

A group of diverse children, including a young boy in the foreground wearing a blue and white striped shirt, are looking at smartphones. The background is slightly blurred, showing other children. The text is overlaid on the image.

Helping Youth Build Healthy Relationships in Real Life and Online.

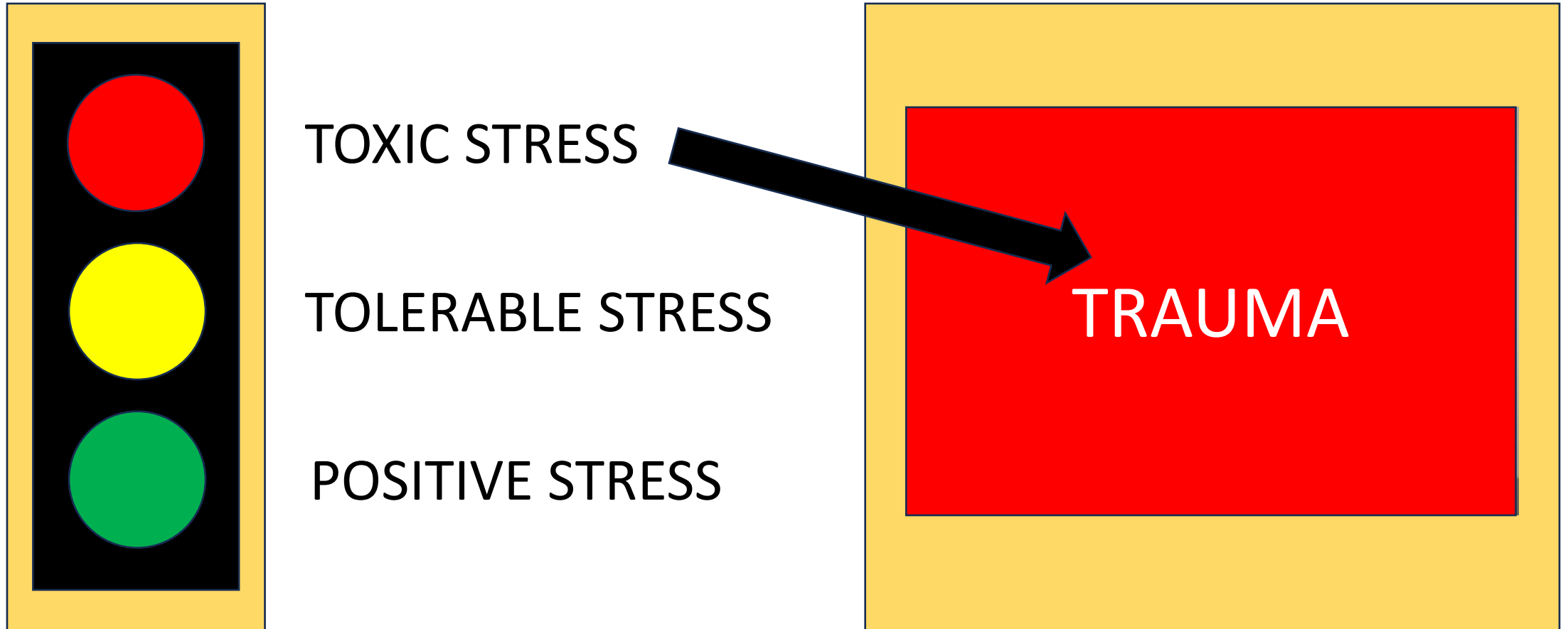
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What is toxic stress?



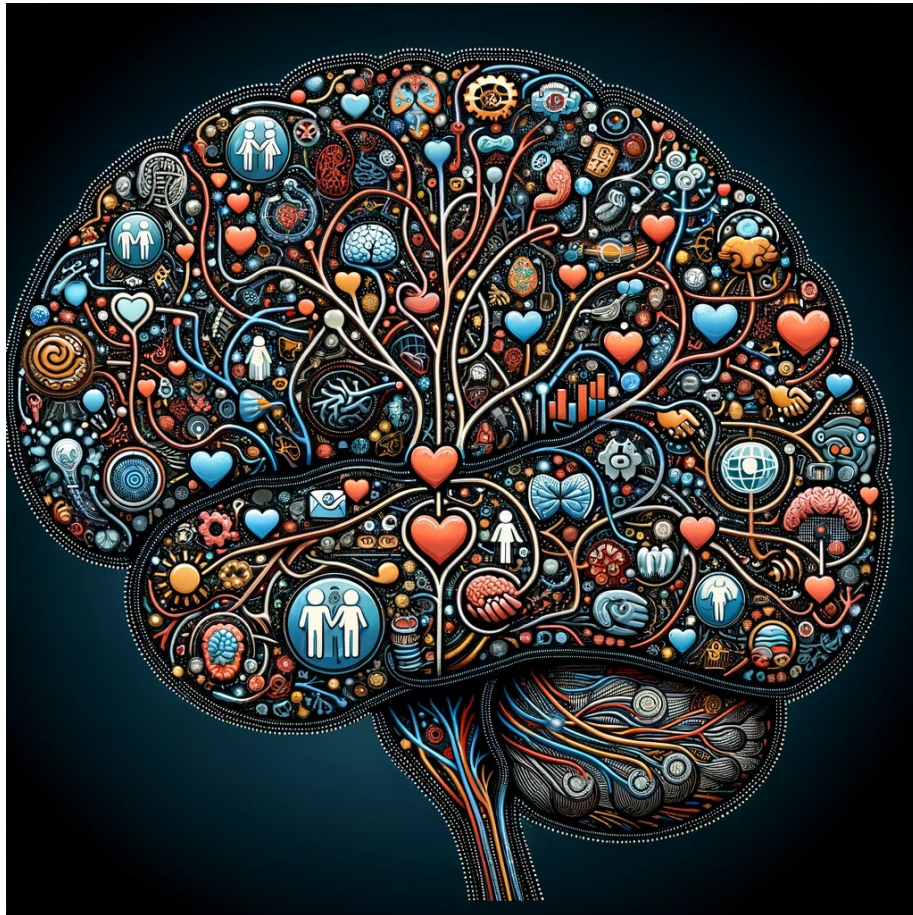
What is a relationship?

We come into the world looking for someone who is looking for us. ~Dr. Curt Thompson



In the earliest seconds of our lives, our survival becomes dependent on human relationships to help us navigate stressful situations.

Our brains wire for dependence on healthy relationships

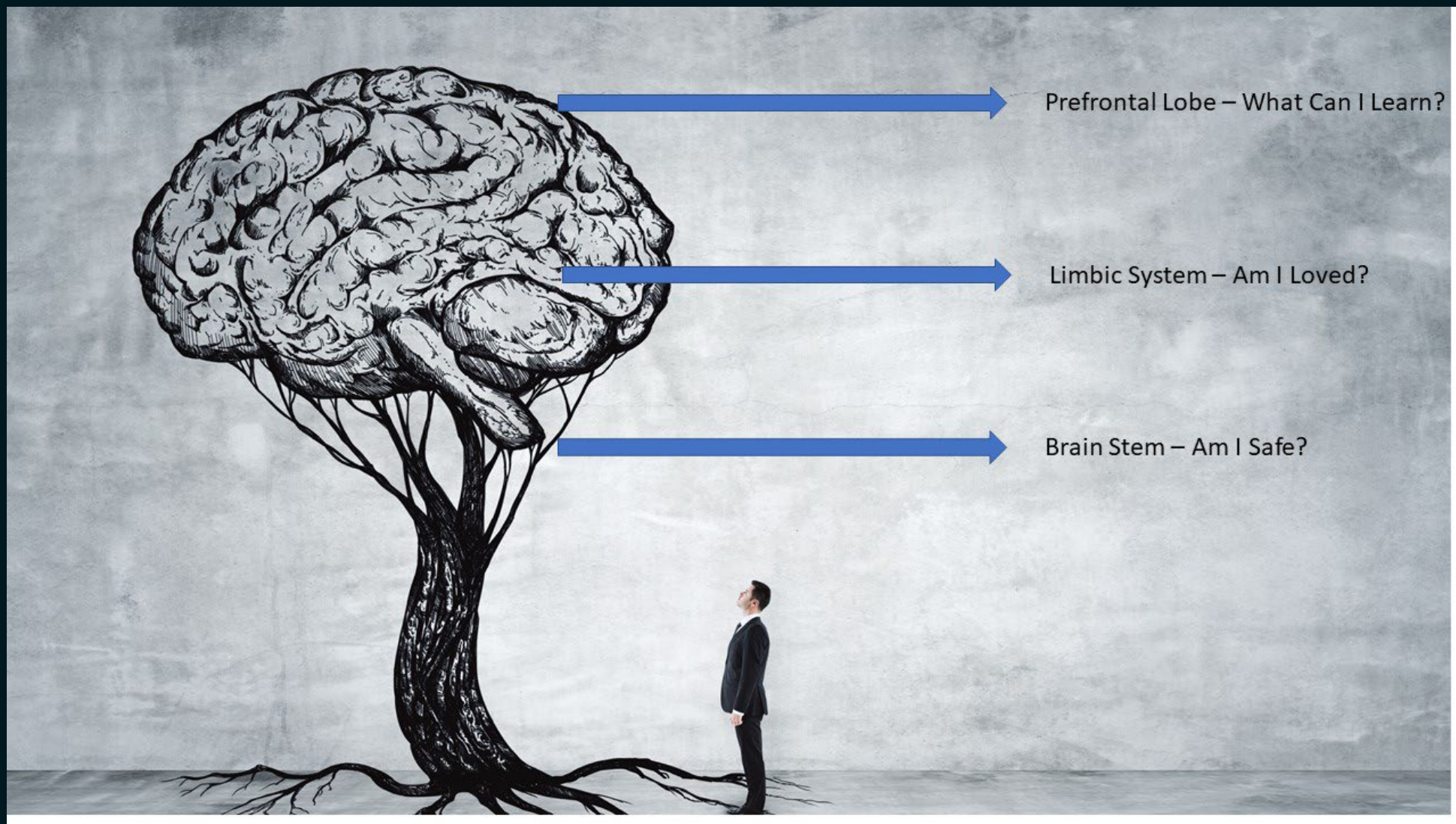


We are born with about 100 billion neurons

Only 20% of those neurons are connected

85% of those connections happen before we turn 3

Almost all of them in the context of relationship



Prefrontal Lobe – What Can I Learn?

Limbic System – Am I Loved?

Brain Stem – Am I Safe?

Human connection in early life is not only crucial for immediate physiological and emotional regulation, but it also has long-term implications for an individual's ability to handle stress and form healthy relationships throughout life.



What is a toxic relationship?



The relationship causes constant stress, anxiety, or fear, impacting daily functioning and mental health.

Bullying and Cyberbullying

Peer Aggression

**Toxic
relationships
in youth:
what they
look like.**

Dating Violence

**Emotional and
Psychological
Abuse**

Factors leading to toxic relationships between youth?

The obsessive use of social media is an attempt to fill a hole, a great hallowing, that took place before anyone had a smartphone. It is, like much of our depression and anxiety, a symptom of our current crisis.

~Johann Hari

- Previous trauma
- Low self-esteem
- Family, peer and media influence
- Social media
- Societal and cultural influence
- **Loneliness**



Research tells us that between 50 and 75% of youth are struggling with loneliness.



According to the 2021 YRBS, only 20% of middle and high school students feeling sad or anxious or depressed said they often or always have someone to talk to about it.

2021 YOUTH RISK BEHAVIOR SURVEY RESULTS

Virginia High School Survey

Trend Analysis Report

Total Injury and Violence

Health Risk Behavior and Percentages																Linear Change*	Quadratic Change*	Change from 2019-2021 †
1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019	2021			
QN25: Percentage of students who felt sad or hopeless (almost every day for ≥ 2 weeks in a row so that they stopped doing some usual activities, ever during the 12 months before the survey)																		
										25.5	25.7	26.9	29.5	32.4	38.2	Increased, 2011-2021	No change, 2011-2015 Increased, 2015-2021	Increased
QN26: Percentage of students who seriously considered attempting suicide (during the 12 months before the survey)																		
										16.9	14.7	14.0	15.7	16.0	20.5	Increased, 2011-2021	Decreased, 2011-2015 Increased, 2015-2021	Increased
QN27: Percentage of students who made a plan about how they would attempt suicide (during the 12 months before the survey)																		
										13.2	15.2	11.7	12.6	11.9	16.4	No linear change	No change, 2011-2017 Increased, 2017-2021	Increased
QN28: Percentage of students who actually attempted suicide (one or more times during the 12 months before the survey)																		
										10.5	9.8	6.7	7.2	7.0	9.0	Decreased, 2011-2021	Decreased, 2011-2015 No change, 2015-2021	No change

The conversations we have
with ourselves can often be
the most toxic conversations
of all.

"The relationship
with yourself sets
the tone for every
other relationship
you have."

~peter crone



**What do we
do now?**

Educate:

The original relational design

**Model, connect and
Support:**

*Some of our youth
have never seen a
healthy relationship.*

Prevent:

*Teach the
warning signs*

**Encourage self-reflection
and regulation:**

*There is power in knowing
how our brain works*

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Thank you